

JOINT MUNICIPAL PLANS: THE PEACE RIVER REGION EXPERIENCE

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JOINT MUNICIPAL PLANS: THE PEACE RIVER REGION EXPERIENCE

A. INTRODUCTION TO JOINT MUNICIPAL PLANS

The purpose of this research paper will be to give some insight into several rural-urban land use issues in the Peace River Region of Alberta and one mechanism, the joint general municipal plan, which has been developed to resolve these issues.

1. Description of the Peace River Region

The Peace River Region is the name given to an area of north-west Alberta and north-east British Columbia. The Alberta Region contains about 84,000 square miles of territory characterized by mountains, forests, rivers and a number of other physical features. Of the many features of the region, the Peace River stands out as the most predominant, as the river flows through the region to the Slave River and Arctic Ocean.

The economic base of the Peace River Region is characterized by a dependance upon natural resource development, particularly agricultural, forestry and oil and gas. Thus, a somewhat undiversified economy exists in the Region.

The settlement pattern of the Peace River Region can be described by the following

- the Region has a population of approximately 110,000 persons;
- about fifty percent of the Region's population live in urban areas;
- many of the urban centres rely on the surrounding rural area as a market, while the rural areas rely on the urban centres for services;
- the provincial highway system and the rail system have greatly contributed to the development of this settlement pattern; and
- many of the urban centres have developed in close proximity to the agricultural areas of the Region.

¹ Peace River Regional Planning Commission, Draft Peace River Regional Plan, (Grande Prairie, Alberta: Peace River Regional Planning Commission, 1982).

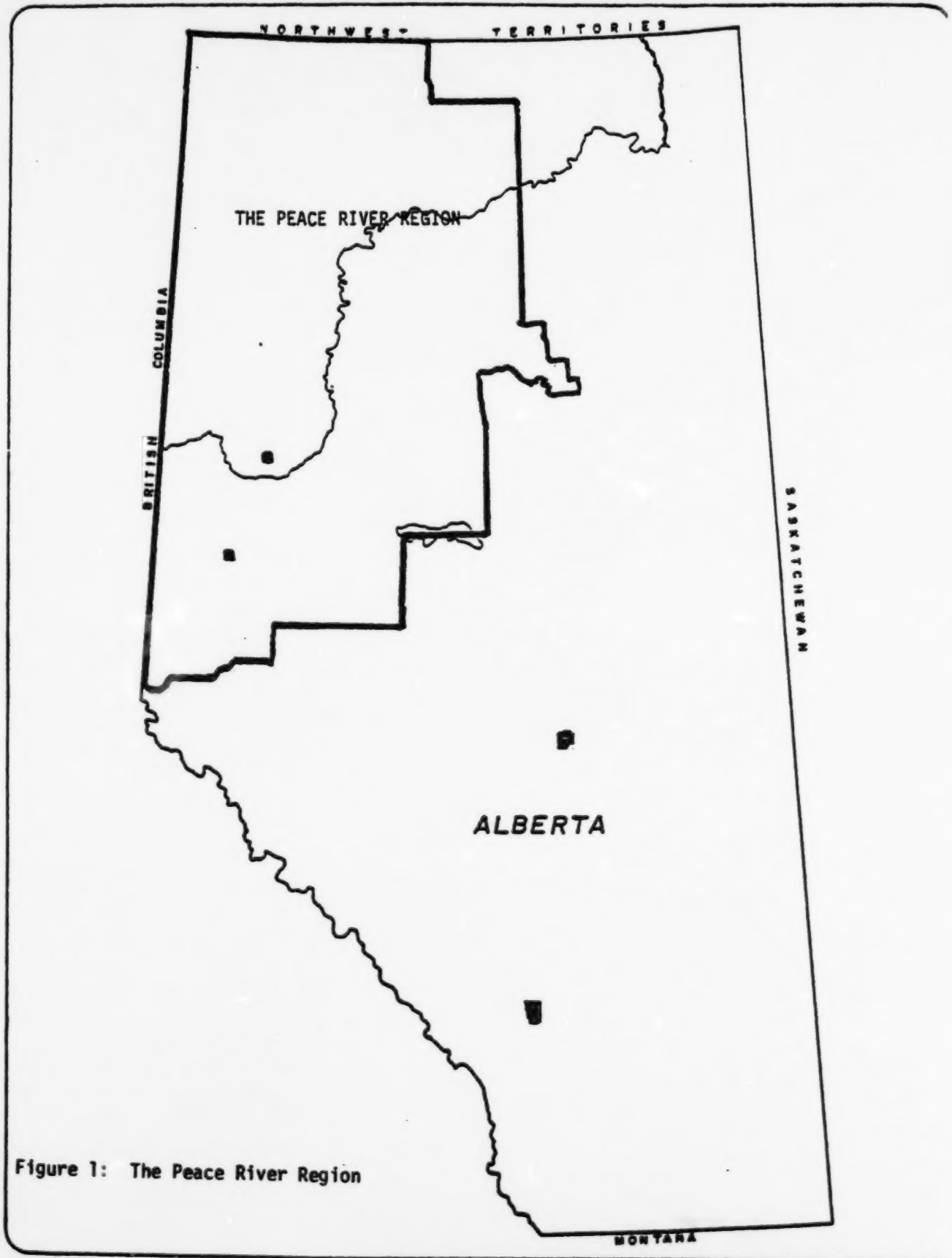


Figure 1: The Peace River Region

The settlement pattern has been based on and will continue to develop through the inter-relationship of the urban centres and the surrounding rural community. This trend, above all else, has established the Region's settlement pattern and plays an important role in the planning of the Region.

2. The Urban-Rural Issues

During the past few years, the character of the urban-rural area has changed due to the increased population, divergence away from the singular agricultural economy and changes in the life styles of people.

The expansion of urban areas has, in many instances, encroached upon a rural area with a different, sometimes, incompatible land use pattern. The interaction of the urban area and the rural area has caused a number of problems. These problems include:

- the loss of agricultural land with growth of the urban area;
- increased land speculation;
- competition for an industrial tax base;
- pressures for strip Highway Commercial development;
- impacts on transportation systems;
- competing land uses;
- demand for recreation facilities; and
- conflicts between agricultural uses and other industries.

The resolution of these issues has been a goal of land use planning in the Peace River Region. Policies exist at both the provincial and regional level which curb scattered growth patterns; however, these lead to conflicts between municipalities. Guidelines for the annexation of land into an urban municipality have been established by the Peace River Regional Planning Commission. During the past year, a new avenue for the resolution of these issues has been developed - the joint general municipal plan. The minimization of conflict between these two areas is important to the continued development of the region. Joint municipal planning is a means towards this end.

3. Joint Municipal Planning

Joint municipal planning means a joint effort by two or more municipalities to determine a land use strategy for the urban-rural area. The land use strategy will usually be in the form of a joint general municipal plan prepared under the auspices of provincial planning legislation. At present, joint plans are legislated under Section 61(3) of The Planning Act of Alberta. (Refer to Section 2).

Joint municipal plans have been used by four municipalities in the southern part of the Province of Alberta. The Town of Carmore and Improvement District No. 8 and the City of Drumheller and Improvement District No. 7 have approved joint general municipal plans so that the Peace region was not the first to explore the avenue. However, Peace region joint plans have improved upon the first attempts and possess some unique attributes.

In the Peace River Region, a number of joint municipal planning efforts have been adopted or are in the process of being prepared. These include:

- The Grande Prairie Joint General Municipal Plan
This plan has been adopted by the City of Grande Prairie and the County of Grande Prairie No. 1.
- The Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan
This plan has been adopted by the Town of Fairview and the Municipal District of Fairview No. 136.
- The Valleyview Joint General Municipal Plan
This plan is still in the preparation process although a draft plan has been presented to the Town of Valleyview and Improvement District No. 16.
- The Peace River Joint General Municipal Plan
This plan is in the initial stages of reviewing background information by a committee composed of the Town of Peace River, the Municipal District of Peace No. 135, Improvement District No. 17 and Improvement District No. 22.

• The Smoky River Joint General Municipal Plan

This plan is in the initial stages of preparation and a terms of reference for the plan is being reviewed by a committee composed of the Municipal District of Smoky River No. 130, the Town of Falher, the Town of McLennan, the Village of Donnelly and the Village of Girouxville.

In each area, there are three similar goals which outline the rationale for preparing a joint general municipal plan:

1. To promote communication on land use matters between the urban and rural municipality.
2. To resolve the traditional urban-rural land use conflicts through a co-ordinated approach to planning for future development.
3. To plan for the orderly and economic development of the urban-rural area.

However, as all urban municipalities are surrounded by good agricultural land, expansion creates conflicts with the rural neighbours because agricultural land is taken out of production. Conversely, the rural municipalities are not allowed to develop prime agricultural land for a tax base as they would be taking land out of production. This basic contradiction has been at the heart of many rural-urban conflicts over the years. The joint plans, which are being pursued, are deemed as a method to overcome this inherent dichotomy and to allow two or more municipalities to expand their economic opportunities and share in growth.

B. THE PLANNING LEGISLATION

Provincial planning legislation is governed by the Province of Alberta's Planning Act, 1980, R.S.A. The Planning Act sets out rules and regulations regarding: all statutory planning documents such as regional plans; general municipal plans and land use bylaws; planning bodies, such as municipal planning commissions and appeal boards; subdivision rules; and other relevant planning guidelines.

A joint general municipal plan is recognized under Section 61(3) of the Planning Act, which states:²

The councils of 2 or more municipalities may, by each passing a by-law in accordance with Part 6, adopt a joint general municipal plan to include those areas of land lying within the boundaries of the municipalities that the councils consider necessary and on its adoption the joint general municipal plan shall be considered to be a general municipal plan for all purposes.

As a general municipal plan, it must conform to the regional plan and is subject to the other rules of this division of the Planning Act regarding content. The role of the regional plan will be discussed later in this section.

The Planning Act also allows for the establishment of a joint municipal planning commission. Municipal planning commissions are empowered under the Act to make decisions on development permits and applications for subdivision as delegated to them by municipal council through the municipality's land use bylaw. A joint municipal planning commission may carry out the same functions in the joint planning area. Hence, the Planning Act provides not only for the adoption of joint general municipal plans but also provides an implementation mechanism.

In addition to the Planning Act, the Province of Alberta also has subdivision regulations which control the subdivision of land. Section 20 of these regulations deals with country residential subdivisions to the extent that it limits the location of such subdivisions within certain distances of an urban municipality.³ This provision of the Subdivision Regulations may be modified by a regional plan, however.

The Peace River Region has a preliminary regional plan in place - Patterns for the Future, which was approved in 1976. The preliminary regional plan has two sections which deal with joint general municipal plans. Joint general municipal plans are considered as local plans under the provisions of the Planning Act and thus must conform to any regional plan in place.

² The Province of Alberta, The Planning Act, R.S.A. (Edmonton, Alberta: Queen's Printer, 1980) page 30.

³ The Province of Alberta, Subdivision Regulations (Edmonton, Alberta: Queen's Printer, 1977) page 13.

The rural industrial policies of the preliminary regional plan allow rural industrial parks in close proximity to an urban area and on prime agricultural land if agreed to under a joint general municipal plan. There are restrictions, however, on the type of industries considered rural and the density of development in order to distinguish between rural and urban development.

In addition, the preliminary regional plan may permit country residential development within the urban radii as identified by Section 20 of the provincial subdivision regulations.

Regional plan policy on joint general municipal plans outlines the general issues which may be addressed in such a document. It states that joint general municipal plans must address the issues of boundaries of the joint planning area and agricultural land preservation but is flexible on other issues such as housing, industry, parkland and the environment. It is at the discretion of the local municipalities to determine which issues affecting them are important and how they should be dealt with. The Preliminary Regional Plan will recognize the local initiatives in the joint general municipal plan. Where municipalities do not address certain issues in a joint planning document, the preliminary regional plan policies still prevail. In short, the regional planning document is cognizant of the need to promote inter-municipal co-operation. The preliminary regional plan, to some length, tries to encourage such co-operation through the utilization of a "carrot approach" - flexibility from certain regulations.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs for the Province of Alberta and the Alberta Planning Board have combined to issue guidelines on rural industrial development and regional plan content. With respect to joint general municipal plans, the guidelines state:⁴

Joint General Municipal Plans are encouraged as an appropriate means for providing detailed control over urban fringe development.

⁴ Alberta Planning Board, Framework for Application of Regional Plan Guidelines (Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Planning Board, April 21, 1982) page 7

The guidelines, while holding no legislative authority, are, nevertheless, a clear indication of provincial government policy. Clearly, the province does favour the creation and adoption of joint general municipal plans as a valuable planning document and as a means to promote inter-municipal co-operation on land use matters.

C. THE GRANDE PRAIRIE JOINT MUNICIPAL PLAN - A CASE HISTORY

The City of Grande Prairie is the largest urban municipality in the Peace River Region with a population of just over 24,000 persons. The County of Grande Prairie is likewise the largest rural municipality in the Peace River Region in terms of population. During the mid to late 1970's the area experienced rapid growth due to expanded oil and gas exploration. While the rural land surrounding the City is predominantly agricultural land, the City has also benefitted from the close proximity to some of Alberta's greatest forests. Indeed the City is a hub of activity for a major sawmill and plywood mill. In addition, a pulp and paper mill is located a few miles to the southeast. As the City of Grande Prairie has grown in relationship to the activity and resource based industries, it has also gained in stature in terms of its importance as a government, institutional and transportation centre. Indeed, the growth prospects for the Grande Prairie area are bright for the future.

It is the experiences with past growth and the desire to accommodate future growth in an orderly fashion the future anticipated growth that has led both the City and the County of Grande Prairie to pursue a joint general municipal plan. Getting two municipalities to agree that they even needed a joint general municipal plan was a major effort in itself, much less getting them to adopt one. Of course, as with many urban and rural municipalities, the rapid growth of the area created many pressures on both municipalities. This in turn put both municipalities at a competitive level in trying to attract and accommodate development.

1. Issues

Early in 1981, a number of issues came to a head which resulted in the two Councils meeting to discuss ways and means of resolving them. The concept of a joint general plan was first conceived. The issues that Councils felt they should address included policies relating to the preservation of agricultural land, housing - both

urban and rural, industrial policies - again, both urban and rural, recreation and parkland, transportation, utilities and services.

2. Agriculture

The plan stressed that good agricultural lands should be protected and that the loss of such lands by reason of annexation by the City of Grande Prairie should be minimized. Furthermore, with the exception of subdivisions for public uses or first parcel out, subdivision of land within agricultural areas should not be permitted. Development would only allow for those uses directly related to agriculture at the size and scale associated with farming.

3. Housing

With respect to the policies regarding urban housing areas, future housing areas were identified within the City boundaries. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the City identified to the County future annexation areas for residential purposes. Growth areas were based largely on the City's ability to service the areas economically, the quality of agricultural land and other surrounding future uses. The County has agreed to minimize the amount of subdivision and development which would take place in these future urban areas. They have also agreed that the City can expand and annex these lands when demand is warranted. Some criteria were developed outlining the phasing of the annexation area.

In return for protecting future City expansion areas, the County is allowed to develop country residential subdivisions on poor agricultural land in close proximity to the City. These areas may be developed provided there is a suitable potable water supply, the soil capability for sewage disposal is proven, access to the site is guaranteed and that such development will not interfere with existing agricultural practices. There are, of course, rules with respect to maximum density of such development, approximately 32 parcels/quarter-section, provided that all factors are appropriate. It is recognized that only 5% of the urban population has expressed in the past or is projected to express in the future a desire to live in the country residential atmosphere. The City has stated that this low percentage does not unduly interfere or contribute significantly to recreation and other expenses incurred by the City.

4. Industry

As with the urban areas reserved for residential purposes, the joint general plan also identifies urban areas for industrial purposes. Similarly, the County has agreed to protect those areas against premature subdivision and development so that the City can eventually annex such lands into the City. Future urban industrial areas were identified based on proximity to rail, road and other transportation network features, existing and future land uses and of course, the servability of the land.

In return the City recognized that certain industries are better situated in the County due to their large land area and minimal servicing requirements. Furthermore, the City recognized that certain uses such as hazardous goods, including anhydrous ammonia storage and bulk petroleum storage, are sometimes better located away from major residential and urban areas. It was decided that certain areas could be identified and developed as rural industrial areas, provided that rural industrial uses should be limited to those industries having low building to site area ratio will not require any form of urban servicing, and lie well beyond the boundary of future annexation areas of the City of Grande Prairie. Essentially the difference between urban and rural development lies in the provision of urban services to such development.

5. Recreation and Parkland

Recreation and parkland policies were also developed. Basically the trade off which occurred related again to the need to co-operate to develop joint recreational facilities. The City recognizes that County residents are going to continue to use urban facilities such as arenas, libraries and so forth. At the same time, a growing urban population will require extensive land areas for trails for cross country skiing, hiking, snow mobiling, motorcycle racing, horseback riding and so forth. It was felt the best way to accommodate all demands was to co-ordinate recreation efforts. Policies reflect these intents.

6. Transportation

Policies were developed with respect to identifying transportation corridors. Many of the transportation corridors, having been identified, led to decisions in terms of future annexation areas for the City.

7. Summary

In summary, both municipalities had to make trade offs in areas previously considered to be exclusive domain, in order to accomplish certain goals and aspirations. In essence, the City gains the protection of future annexation areas and has decision making abilities in the rural areas. In return, the County gains knowledge of where the annexation areas are, the size and extent and the same frame under which they might be annexed. As well, the County is able to develop a rural tax base through rural industrial development without fear of annexation from the City. As long as both municipalities continue to abide by the rules which have been established, all development will be able to co-exist peacefully.

8. Implementation

In order to ensure the long term success of this plan, it was necessary to devise an implementation strategy. This implementation strategy involved the creation of a Joint Municipal Planning Commission and other such measures to maximize ongoing co-operation and communication between the two municipalities. The Joint Municipal Planning Commission is the first of its kind in the Province of Alberta.

Other co-operative aspects include a circulation of subdivisions to each municipality, a City alderman to sit on the County's Development Appeal Board to hear appeals on development which might impact negatively on the City and a variety of other mechanisms.

D. THE FAIRVIEW JOINT MUNICIPAL PLAN

In October, 1982, the Municipal District of Fairview gave third reading to Bylaw No. 643, while during November, 1982, the Town of Fairview gave third reading to Bylaw No. 611. The purpose of these bylaws was to enact a joint general municipal plan between the two municipalities for the Fairview area. The following is a case history of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan.

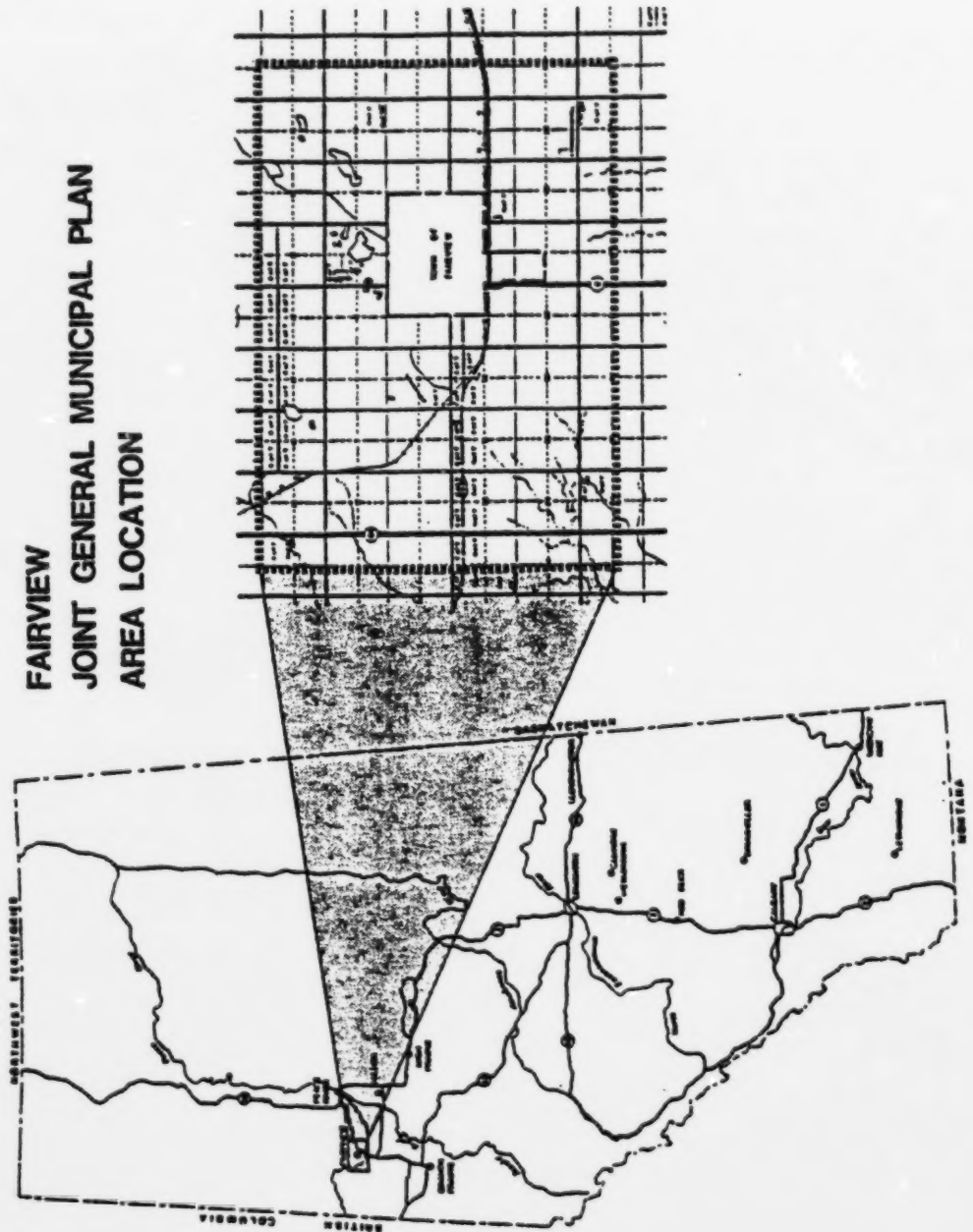
1. Location and Description

The Town of Fairview is located about 120 kilometres north of the City of Grande Prairie. The rural municipality that surrounds the Town is known as the Municipal District of Fairview.

Figure 2 shows the location of Fairview in relation to the rest of the province.

Figure 2

**FAIRVIEW
JOINT GENERAL MUNICIPAL PLAN
AREA LOCATION**



The Town of Fairview is predominately an agricultural service centre with a population of approximately 3,200 persons in 1982. Institutional facilities also play an important role in the economic make-up of the Community. In recent years, the petroleum industry has contributed to the economy of this urban area in the form of servicing firms within the Town. The Town of Fairview has a number of well established residential areas surrounding a central business district. The industrial sector of the Town has developed in a southerly direction in close proximity to rail and highway access.

2. The Preparation Process

Both municipal councils thoroughly discussed the pros and cons of adopting a joint planning document. The result of these council discussions was the initiating of a preparation process. The first step was the establishment of a joint planning committee to prepare a draft plan. Figure 3 outlines the preparation process used by the Town of Fairview in conjunction with the Municipal District.

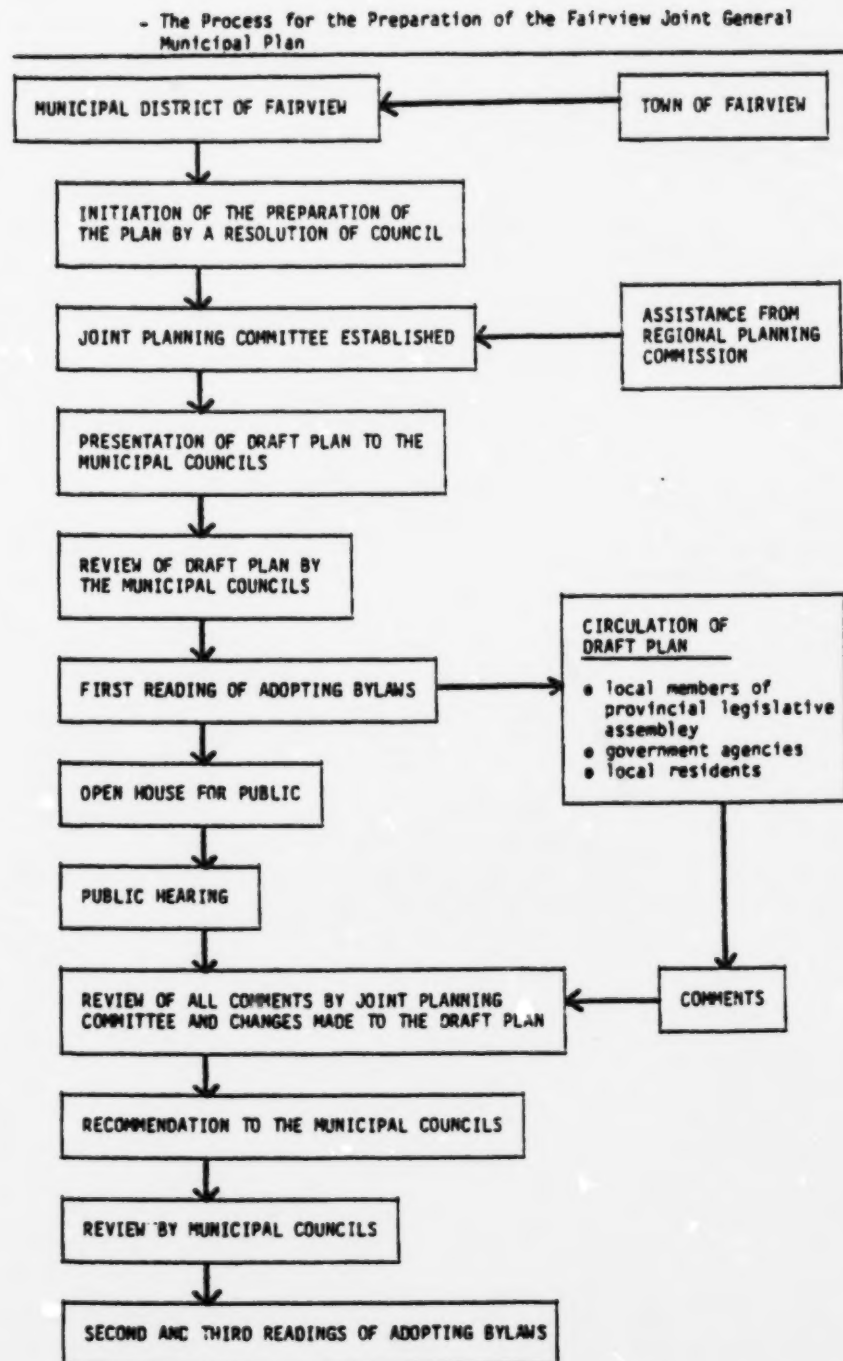
The mandate of the committee was to prepare a draft plan for the respective municipal councils and recommend policies to be contained within the plan. The committee consisted of six members, three from each municipality.

Public participation was a key aspect to the preparation process and important to both municipal councils. It was felt that the joint general municipal plan was a new concept and that input from the residents of the area was vital in order to achieve a positive end result. An open house was held with the aim of educating the people affected by and interested in the joint plan concept. The draft plan was available for scrutiny and comment. One-to-one contact between the public, members of council, municipal administration and the planners was the key ingredient to the success of the open house. As required by provincial planning legislation, a formal public hearing was held and submissions were received by the Fairview Joint Planning Committee.

The end result was the adoption of a plan for the mutual benefit of both municipalities and continued co-operation between them.

A similar preparation process has been used by other joint municipal planning ventures in the Peace River Region, including the Grande Prairie document.

Figure 3



3. Contents of the Plan

One of the important aspects of the preparation process was the setting of the joint planning area boundaries which, to some extent, dictated the contents of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan. In the case of the Fairview area's Joint General Municipal Plan, the provincial highway system, the location of the municipal airport, the watershed area and the existing pattern of development all contributed to the setting of the boundary of the plan.

The Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan set policies related to the following areas of land use planning: development on agricultural lands; rural industrial land use; urban industrial / highway commercial growth; country residential development; transportation planning; utilities; the water supply drainage basin; and recreation.

The plan also establishes a future land use strategy outlining the future directions for growth. The strategy designates land areas for certain types of land uses.⁵

The industrial development strategy set by the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan is the key policy section. The strategy attempts to differentiate between rural industry and urban industry by using lot size and servicing requirement standards. The rural industrial area will be designated to accommodate on-site services on larger lots (3 acres, plus) while urban industrial development will be municipally served and more intensively developed. The plan designates a node for rural industrial development. The rural industrial node was selected due to a number of site features including: good rail access; highway access; proximity to the municipal airport; and the fact that some rural industrial development had taken place within the area designated as a rural industrial node.

Urban industrial growth areas were also designated by the future land use schedule of the plan. The urban industrial area was designated based on the following characteristics of the area: municipal servicing availability; good highway access rail access; and the existing land use pattern of the urban area.

⁵ Town of Fairview and Municipal District of Fairview No. 136, The Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan (Fairview, Alberta: The Fairview Joint Planning Committee, 1982) page 26.

An interesting component of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan is the recognition of the need to provide protection for the Town's water supply. Proposed developments in the water supply drainage basin will be assessed with respect to the impact development may have on water quality or quantity.

A number of policies directly promote communication between the Municipal District and the Town. Two examples of these are:⁶

- Co-operation between the Municipal District and the Town with regard to increased regional air transportation services and facilities shall be supported. The establishment and continued operation of the Fairview Airport Commission shall also be supported.
- Co-operation between the Municipal District and the Town with regard to the planning and development of recreation facilities shall be promoted.

The Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan also resolved a number of other joint planning issues through the setting of policies. These policies included:

- protection of prime agricultural land around the Town of Fairview;
- directing highway commercial land uses to the urban centre;
- restricting multi-parcel country residential in the joint planning area but allowed one parcel to be subdivided out of a quarter section for country residential purposes;
- ensuring proper water and sewer servicing for development in the joint planning area; and
- restricting access onto the provincial highway system and co-operation on road development proposals.

4. Implementation

The cornerstone for the implementation of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan is the continued communication between the two municipalities and the co-ordination of efforts on planning matters for the Fairview area. This statement, above all else, sets the stage on how the plan will be implemented and used.

⁶ Town of Fairview and Municipal District of Fairview No. 136, The Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan (Fairview, Alberta: The Fairview Joint Planning Committee, 1982) pages 21 and 23.

An agreement, such as a joint general municipal plan, is only as good as the intentions of the parties involved to co-operate.

The establishment of a joint planning committee to review issues with the interpretation or administration of the plan is extremely important to the implementation process. The committee will make recommendations to the respective municipal councils on methods to resolve any problems.

If the Fairview Joint Planning Committee of the municipal councils are unable to resolve the conflict, then the matter shall be referred to the Alberta Planning Board for resolution. (Province of Alberta Planning Act, 1980, R.S.A. - Section 44)

The day-to-day administration of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan is the responsibility of the Municipal District of Fairview. This system was used due to the fact that the Municipal District of Fairview Land Use Bylaw will be the implementing tool for the policies of the plan. This is why in the Fairview area all subdivision and development applications will be circulated between two municipalities. In Grande Prairie, a special Joint Municipal Planning Commission has been established. This Joint Municipal Planning Commission consists of both representatives from the City Council and has decision making power on development permits and may make recommendations on subdivisions, by-law amendments and the like. Other municipalities, now pursuing joint general plans, will have variations on these two approaches.

E. FUTURE OF JOINT MUNICIPAL PLANNING

What is the future of joint general municipal plans? This type of planning is new to the Peace River Region, not to mention Alberta so many of the following comments are speculative in nature. Joint Plans have not been in place long enough to fully evaluate their success.

1. Role of Politicians and Staff

Perhaps the key element in the success achieved to date is the resolve of the municipal politicians to co-operate on planning matters. The success of the joint municipal planning process hinged on the co-operation and communication of

the municipal politicians. Without the ability of the politicians to look beyond their own boundaries and throw out often parochial views, joint plans may never have been approved. The key municipal administrators also had to communicate during the process and ensure the steady progress of the joint municipal planning process. They too had to set aside their self centered attitudes and look at the greater benefit. It is safe to say that the personalities involved in the joint municipal planning process felt that, politically and technically, a joint general municipal plan could be a method of promoting harmony between the urban municipality and the neighboring rural municipality.

The planners' role was to provide the technical support to the joint municipal planning process. This role included: providing the municipalities with land use alternatives; interpreting provincial and regional planning legislation regarding joint general municipal plans; compiling background information on various land use issues; and assisting the joint planning committees during the preparation of the joint general municipal plan. The end result is a local planning document aimed at bringing the two communities together, recognizing both local and regional concerns.

2. Implementation

Both the Grande Prairie Joint General Municipal Plan and the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan have been tested, though somewhat limited, in terms of implementation.

Both joint planning areas have experienced a number of minor applications for subdivision since the adopting of the plans. The joint municipal planning function has worked very well in these situations, and in the long run actually reduced the amount of time it takes for a final decision. One major rural industrial application for subdivision has been proposed for the Grande Prairie joint planning area and is currently being reviewed by both municipalities.

Only one amendment has been proposed to either of the adopted joint general municipal plans. An amendment to the Grande Prairie Joint General Municipal Plan was proposed by a group of individuals in order to accommodate an industrial use in an agricultural designated area. The Grande Prairie Joint Municipal Planning Commission has recommended refusal of this proposed amendment to the Joint Council Committee. The reasons for this course of action included:

- a number of industrial areas are available in the Grande Prairie area to accommodate this type of land use;
- the land in question has high capability for agricultural production; and
- the future impacts on the area's transportation system.

In the case of the Fairview Joint General Municipal Plan, some of the policies contained in the document have been a catalyst for action, such as the continued operation of the Fairview Municipal Airport Commission; a co-ordinated approach to attracting increased regional oil transportation to the Fairview area; and the initial steps being taken to study the storm run-off - erosion - flooding problems south of the Town of Fairview.

It has been mentioned that joint general municipal plans could act as a replacement to regional planning. Some people have suggested that joint general municipal plans are in fact "mini regional plans" that address regional issues. In light of the joint municipal planning process that has been used in the Peace River Region, there may be some merit to this approach, although many issues still remain regional in nature and affect more than just the municipalities involved in a joint general municipal plan. Certainly, the joint municipal planning process can go a long way to assist the resolution of certain regional issues. Basically, the regional planning process and the joint municipal planning process should be able to complement one another. Above all else, current provincial planning legislation still uses a hierarchy whereby joint general municipal plans must conform to regional plan policy. Until the provincial planning legislation is amended, the existing planning hierarchy will remain.

Nevertheless, local politicians are currently viewing joint plans as a progressive piece of planning legislation. It enables municipalities who work together to share in growth previously encumbered by many other rules and regulations, both provincial and regional. Joint plans enable municipalities to cut through some of the red tape, while at the same time, preserving the integrity of the original legislative intent.

The future may also prove that a number of pitfalls exist in the joint municipal planning process. Many of these pitfalls are inherent in the process. They include:

- a demise in the relationship between the two municipalities at the political or administrative levels of implementation;
- a change in the make-up of the municipal councils after an election and subsequent anti-joint general municipal plan feelings;
- pressures for development may alter the goals and aspirations of either municipality; and
- unsuitable forum for resolution of disputes.

Clearly, any alteration to the communicative co-operative environment under which a joint general municipal plan was prepared may lead to the downfall of the plan and process.

Conversely, the joint municipal planning process may lead to even more co-operative ventures between the urban and rural municipality. Such ventures as taxing agreements; joint recreation boards, and servicing agreements may occur on a joint basis between the municipalities.

Indeed much of the success, to date, has been in getting the plans approved. Politicians and administrators alike are being recognized across the province for their innovativeness shown.

The implementation of the two joint general municipal plans has, to date, been reasonably successful and has not met with any major problems. Time will tell the long term success of these documents. The key is communication between the various parties. The joint approach to decision making on issues of mutual concern is permanent.

3. The Future of Joint General Municipal Plans

Now that two joint general municipal plans have been established in the Peace River Region, what does the future hold for this type of planning in the Peace River Region? On an optimistic note - the future seems bright for joint general municipal planning in the Peace River Region. Its popularity, as a means of resolving urban-rural issues, is growing.

However, before Joint Plans become more comprehensive, changes to provincial planning legislation should be made in order to better respond to the joint municipal planning process. Changes to the Province of Alberta Subdivision Regulations related to highway commercial development in the vicinity of urban areas and a clearer approach to joint plan implementation have been suggested.

4. Concluding Remarks

In order for joint general municipal plans to work and remain viable, the communication between the municipalities must continue. The communication has to be at the political and administrative level of the local governments. The future success of joint municipal planning rests in this concept and, in many ways, only this concept. After all when one looks for a reason for the success of these two joint general municipal plans, the resoluteness of the municipal politicians ranks first.

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